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Adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings for refugees: lessons from european context

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The ongoing refugee crisis is described as the most important concern since the Second World War, which has caused a great displacement of people. Many of these immigrants have been departing towards Mediterranean countries, as first-line states, seeking for a chance to enter the Europe. This situation has created a challenging condition for many refugee accepting cities as well as for the migrants to get integrated within the new society. This fact has had a great influence on the sustainability condition while the rapid and uncontrolled inflows can overwhelm the host countries' capacities to integrate new arrivals. In this regard, some European countries including Germany and Italy are coming about with strategies for accommodation and integration of these refugees in their countries. This paper aims to study and analyze two of the current case studies reflecting adaptive reuse strategies in European context for providing refugees' temporary housing facilities. In the context of this research, using the existing building stock introduced as the dominant strategy which can provide refugees with a proper shelter and also while providing the chance for their urban integration can contribute to revitalization of urban areas with the newcomers' participation. By analyzing the Berlin's largest refugee shelter inside Tempelhof Airport as the first case study, the major policies in Germany for providing refugee housing in national and local levels have been investigated. However, the second case study - Ex-Moi in Turin, is characteristically different from the case of Tempelhof airport of Berlin; since the refugees occupied the abandoned facility of the Olympic Village and settled down there. Regarding the fact that there is an urgent need for long-term policies and sustainable approaches to cope with the current refugee crisis, this research tries to shed a light on the path towards providing temporary housings by analyzing.

1. Introduction

The ongoing refugee crisis in the Europe is described as one of the most important socio-political concerns since the Second World War. Whether economic, climate, hegemonic, religious or political and geopolitical reasons, the current refugee problem reveals the current state of the world: current unrests because of the wars in Libya, Yemen, Afghanistan, Iraq and many other and more severely recent ongoing war in Syria have caused massive population displacements, where millions of people found themselves in warzones and many of them started to migrate. This is what makes people flee their own countries to other parts of the world, in search of peace, stability and better life conditions. However, the growing Middle Eastern, Asian, and African Diasporas in Europe have significant socio-spatial consequences in immigrants' destination countries. Based on the UNHCR report on 27th August 2015, there were 8.6 million new movements linked with the violence and conflicts in 28 countries during 2015. More than half of this portion (4.8 million) was from Middle east and North Africa [1] and particularly, many of these population flow towards countries along the Mediterranean Sea.

These high levels of immigration into the EU brought both benefits and challenges. Many economists believe that in view of the low birthrates and population ageing concerns in the majority of EU countries, a large number of immigrants will preserve the potential for European economic growth. At the same time, rapid and uncontrolled inflows can overwhelm the host countries' capacities to integrate new arrivals. The EU's current legislative and institutional arrangements are not clearly set up to deal with the refugee crisis situations. Thus, the local Europe-wide municipalities are not able to properly receive the incoming families and individuals seeking for help.

For proposing an integrated solution to this new ongoing geopolitical crisis, there are two interconnected steps. The first is to recognize the roots that led to this huge flux of immigration. As, many immigrants to Europe have come as the result of conflicts and war in their homeland or for socio-economic reasons from the Middle East and North Africa, with an intense desire to achieve a more stable life in the Europe. Identifying the situation and burdens of this massive displacement on the first-line states like Turkey, Greece and Italy especially after Syrian civil war follows this issue. What countries such as Croatia, Serbia, Slovenia or Hungary are experiencing now is something that has been present for years in Greece, Macedonia and Italy especially in Lampedusa. Regarding the fact that providing resources for accommodation, education, employment, and security assistance for refugees would acknowledge the burdens these front line countries bear and help ensuring their continuing stability, analyzing the current situation in these states and recognizing their priorities and required necessities are critical. However, this first step although is the initial and very critical phase of achieving a comprehensive solution, is not addressed in this article and requires more detailed investigation in further studies.

The second step is analyzing the existing capacities and strategies of European countries that are accepting the influx of immigrants. The number of these immigrants is growing and many of them are settled down in camp-like spaces or in temporary new shelters. However, there are great stocks of vacant buildings or abandoned sites in Europe that can be considered as a solution. Using the existing building stock can provide

the asylum seekers and refugees with a proper shelter in one hand and also can contribute to revitalization of decaying locations with the newcomers' participation, on the other hand which consequently enhances socio-spatial sustainability. Adaptive reuse [2] of vacant buildings can be a proper strategy that improves the integration of the immigrants to the existing society. As, many of the temporary shelters and camps are located far from the society where the migrants encounter with the problem of transportation and lack of opportunities for social interaction, as a basic need for getting integrated to the new environment and developing the sense of place attachment [3].

In this respect, this paper is studying some response of migration policies that can be a starting point to achieve a more sustainable solution for refugee shelters and facilities based on the experiences of two identically different cases from Italy and Germany in the European context.

2. Adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings for integration of refugees in the local urban context

Starting from 1960 and 1970, due to the growing concern for the environment and increasing fuel and material costs, the term 'Adaptive Reuse' came in to mainstream architectural practice. Where abandoned or disused buildings can no longer function with its original use, proposing a new function is inevitable in order to preserve the significance of the historical buildings and enhance the urban resiliency [4]. Considering the fact that abandoned properties impose numerous social and economic costs, the recycling of an existing building allows it to serve contemporary uses is a component of rehabilitation. Moreover, as abandonment increases in a neighborhood, more and more owners become less willing to maintain their real state and eventually more and more properties fall into eventual abandonment [5].

Nowadays many European cities are dealing with the current refugee crisis. Providing proper accommodation facilities in a resilient integration process is one of the main challenges of the destination countries and is important step towards the social equity. Many of these displaced people are settled down in urban areas and the role of local municipalities in addressing their housing needs is very critical. The equally placement of them within urban fabric is very important in creating an integration between newcomers and the host communities and preventing further socio-cultural and spatial problems. In this context, abandoned buildings and pre-existing public structures can offer special opportunity in terms of providing a proper accommodation, accessibility to public services and a chance for social integration for refugees.

Based on the UNHCR report on 27th August 2015: "With almost 60 million people forcibly displaced globally and boat crossing of the Mediterranean in the headlines almost daily, it is becoming increasingly common to see the terms *refuges* and *migrant* being used interchangeably in media and public discourse" [1]. With such increasing numbers of refugees within Europe, finding appropriate and affordable temporary housing and long-term solutions became a great challenge. Of the many challenges to be dealt with is creating more concrete strategies in both national and local level across Europe in congruence with each other. The provision of *Housing Distribution Policies*

among the European countries represented a considerable difference in temporary and permanent refugee housing. The challenge is more noticeable in addressing the housing needs in the cities' level where they are coping with the shortage of housing capacities in one hand and on the other hand, they are dealing with the insufficient national strategies or problems with the implementation of the policies in local level.

In some countries such as Germany, the Netherlands and Sweden municipalities provide temporary shelters to house flux of incoming refugees. However, in some EU countries like Portugal and Czech Republic, refugees are supposed to find their own private flats through reception centers. In the case of France and Spain, temporary reception facilities will host refugees and asylum seekers. At local level, each EU country chooses a different way towards the *Housing Allocation Regulations* to receive and accommodate refugees. However, all across the Europe, cities are facing vacant property crises due to the massive population decline. In 2014, Britain's Guardian Newspaper says that 1.8 million homes are empty in Germany-more than 3.4 million in Spain, over 2 million in both France and Italy and more than 700,000 in the UK [6]. The problems resulted from these vacant properties has appeared as different urban crisis in three dimensions of environmental, social and economic, which has made these communities unsustainable and instable and made experts think about other methods of urban development patterns [7]. On the other hand, since adaptive reuse of older buildings is a sustainable option that enhances the urban regeneration process, it provides a platform for achieving sustainable development [8]. Moreover, due to the contemporary economic crisis, new strategies for adaptive reuse processes are required [9].

In this respect, the vacant buildings offer unique opportunity for providing a community building for new occupants. It enhances the connection of the refugees to the neighborhoods and assists the creation of their identity and sense of attachment with the new urban space. Moreover, it facilitates the acceptance of the newcomers by the local inhabitant as a part of their local community. It also benefits the refugees by the ease of access to public social, cultural and economic services. Thus, incorporating the refugees within the urban context while enhancing their socio-cultural status can promote the social cohesion and prevents the marginalization. Furthermore, providing the possibility of participating in economic activities and employment opportunities for refugees through a systematic process of initial training and leading them to be involved in the economic activities of the local community (regarding their skills) in one hand can decrease the dependence of refugees on the governmental aids in a period of time and on the other hand, as a new labor force, can contribute to the economic growth of the local community.

Currently, countries like Spain and Italy are utilizing existing vacant buildings to accommodate refugees. On the other hand, due the lack of accommodation space in cities like Berlin, the municipality provides the temporary shelters for refugees with a completely different perspective [Table 1]. The following chapter aims to introduce two current case studies in Berlin and Turin as the temporarily housed the refugees in the vacant buildings. Through comparison of two current case studies in Germany and Italy, this research tries to analyze the advantages and challenges of the adaptive reuse of abandoned buildings, as the temporary housing policy for refugees.

3. Germany’s largest refugee shelter inside Berlin’s Tempelhof Airport

Originally built between 1936 and 1941, Tempelhof as part of Albert Speer’s plan for the reconstruction of Berlin as the ‘World Capital’ during the Nazi era, was built by Professor Ernst Sagebiel as the one of the most iconic pre-World War II airports in Europe. It’s monumental terminal was refashioned by Nazi architects in the 1930s to serve as grand gateway for Hitler’s third Reich. However, after the war, the airport was utilized by cold war American forces for the massive airlift of supplies to occupy West Berlin during the USSR blockade of 1948-1949 [10]. Although the airport officially closed on 2008, in May 2014, after years of fighting, majority of officials chose to keep the site unchanged. During this time, the terminals arcing hangers have been often used to host large-scale events such as World Architecture Festival.



Fig. 1 / Refugee shelters inside Berlin’s Tempelhof Airport. © Gordon Welters for the New York Times

	Policy Key points	Housing Distribution	Organizations/Institutions in charge
National Level	First three months refugees wait for registration at one place, after that they are moved to a hostel or their own apartment. In case on having a permit to stay, they can themselves, look for an apartment while a room at a hostel is at their disposal.	Admission quotes for each state based on tax revenues and population. Administrative buildings not in use; camps; refurbished public buildings; emergency accommodations (first time arriving to Germany)	LeGeSo (State Office for Health and Social Affairs) department responsible for new accommodations; State controlled housing companies; Federal Ministry for the environment, Nature Conservation, Building and Nuclear Safety (financial support for housing); National and regional associations (ex. GdW national and BBU regional)
	Municipality Role	Housing Distribution	Tools/Instruments/Framework/Facilities
Local Level	Highest Priority is to accommodate refugees for a first period of time; No extra money for especial housing refugees program. In the case of Berlin the expenses for new building increased dramatically (triple) starting from 2017.	No distribution model, it depends on where the areas for new buildings exist.	Buildings owned by the land are being furnished for housing people; private citizens are asked for support.
Challenges	Increased prices for building houses; expensive construction due to energy restrictions in buildings.		
Opportunities	New housing will be built; the LaGeSo accommodate refugees in Tempelhof airport (not in use); administrative buildings (not in use) and air inflated structures (new).		

Tab. 1 / Germany’s major policies for providing refugee housing in national and local levels. © The International Federation of Housing and Planning (IFHP) Annual Report.

Based on the official statistics, in 2015, more than 1 million refugees arrived in Germany with hopes of a better life [11] (Fig. 1, Tab. 1). Based on the report by *Deutsche Welle* [12] Berlin's Mayor, *Michael Müller* states that the majority of refugees are housed in temporary refugee accommodation and mass shelters and the rest are living in private flats. However, starting from 2015, the airport's shuttered hangars are being reused to temporarily house the largest emergency refugee shelter in Germany [13].

4. Occupying abandoned Olympic Village by refugees in Turin

The Olympic Village, now called Ex-Moi (Fig. 3), initially has been designed as a part of a project for Torino urban transformation while conveying sustainability intentions. The MOI site has been selected for the project site in the Lingotto District because of availability of vacant buildings of the Ex-Moi and its proper connection through transportation means. For this purpose, the Olympic village, composed of six or seven-stories buildings in 6 phase, is constructed with the initial objective of hosting journalists and athletes for sixteen days during the Torino Winter Olympic Games of 2006 (Fig. 2). It was a 140.5-million-euro project as a part of urban planning projects for large specific events that financed through public spending. It was supposed to get re-functioned for post-Olympic use which never happened. The establishment abandoned after the Games for almost 7 years till it got occupied in 2013 by the North African refugees [14]. The occupiers were more than 1000 people [15] from almost 30 different ethnic groups, with a large number of women and children and inhabited in the four buildings of the setting in a poor living condition. These refugees had lost their primary residences, which was provided by the Italian government as a short period accommodation assistance and had no other choice than finding a shelter for themselves.

Initially, after the occupying the facility, there were no objections by the political parties and the residents of the district. Neighbors even offered to help the refugees with first need goods and local authorities provided the basic services like water, until crimes had reported in the neighborhood. This fact caused much opposition by media and political parties like Lega Nord and the local court of Turin issued an eviction order and the sequestration of the buildings, which has not executed yet.

This case well manifests the social and spatial segregation of these squatting people where they live in a modern ghetto-like settlement, surrounded by the railways. The debates about this informal settlement are still ongoing; some political parties are opposing and many social activists are on the refugees' side to compensate the insufficiency of the local supporting polices.

This specific case study highlights the importance of policies adopted in national and local level in Italy and their impact on the destiny of refugees after being accepted. Actually, the policies regarding accepting refugees in Italy, like many other countries, is not clearly defined. The first rescue and assistance is done in CPSA, which is a very short period hosting place. Then, first reception centers and temporary accommodation structure (CAS) is taking place, managed by public local entities. The second-line reception is SPRAR. Depending on the forms of protection, the presence of refugees is allowed in Italy for 5 years. But SPRAR provides assistance for the first 6-12 months in which they are not allowed to work and their well-being is provided by the State.

SPRAR is responsible for providing accommodation, counseling, language and professional training [Table 2]. After this short-term assistance, the asylum seekers are obliged to meet their own accommodation and employment needs. Indeed, many of these people are faced with many difficulties to overcome and it may result in what happened in the case like Ex-Moi. It can be stated that the gap between national legal framework and local implementation of policies has a significant impact on deficiency of foreseen policies [16].



Fig. 2 / Torino Olympics Village, 2006, Before Occupation (Resource: <https://thesocietypages.org/clippings/2016/03/23/olympic-village-occupy/>).



Fig. 3 / Ex-Moi, after being occupied by refugees in 2013 (Resource: <http://viedifuga.org/ex-moi-di-torino-in-via-giordano-bruno-non-ce-la-guerra-civile/>).

	Policy Key points	Housing Distribution	Organizations/Institutions in charge
National Level	The first phase of assistance is done in CPSA. And then in reception centers for a short-time accommodation by CAS. The second phase of reception is by SPRAR for 6-12 months (accommodation, and counseling needs).	SPRAR accommodation structure composed of flats (82%), small reception centers (12%) and community homes (6%). Though considerable, the growth of SPRAR is not sufficient to meet the accommodation needs, as SPRAR places cover only the 20% of the effective reception demand.	Italian network of migrants hospitality consists today of 1861 temporary regional structures, 430 Sprar Projects, 14 Centri di accoglienza (CDA), 14 Centri accoglienza richiedenti asilo (CARA), 4 Centro di primo soccorso e accoglienza and 5 Centri di identificazione ed espulsione. Private accommodation structures that are not part of the national reception system. Non-profit organizations, NGO's, churches
	Municipality Role	Housing Distribution	Tools/Instruments/Framework/Facilities
Local Level	A gap between national legal framework and local implementation of policies.	Shortage of available accommodation in the formal reception system. Not specific distribution model, but mostly in isolated areas. Because of lack of economic and non-economic resources and inadequate housing policies, squatting and informal settlement is one of the refugees' reactions.	SPRAR accommodation structure composed of flats. Private accommodation structures that are not part of the national reception system.
Challenges	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -National reception system is not able to successfully meet accommodation needs of asylum seekers and no particular official policy exists. -Private organizations like NGO's try to fill the national system's gap. -Housing shortage and lack of support for social inclusion of refugees. -Reduction of public spending on social protection. -Action of squatting by refugees for providing shelter. - Spatial exclusion and fragmentation 		
Opportunities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -The presence of refugees is useful for Italian economy, since the pro-capita daily cost per refugee is 35 euros in 2014. -There is a possibility of revitalization of the abandoned spaces through the presence of newcomers and their social integration with the existing society. 		

Tab. 2 / Italy's major policies for providing refugee housing in national and local levels [17][18].

5. Conclusions

The current strike refugee crisis and mass immigration has deeply affect the Europe. Particularly the countries such as Italy and Greece which are the gateways for these displaced people or countries like Germany that is a target destination of the large migrant groups because of its hospitality strategies are encountering more challenges. For getting the best positive effects out of this crisis, this paper aims to emphasize on urban integration, social equity and resilience in global scale. For achieving the sustainable development in refuge cities, urban integration is a key criterion. However, the capacity of countries to react quickly and adapt their systems and societies to absorb different kinds of shocks, their Resilience in other words is also an important factor. Becoming more resilient means that a city strives to enhance its ability to bounce back and grow even stronger and better in the face of the chronic stresses and acute shocks. The adaptive reuse of pre-existing buildings for housing refugees as described in two case studies presents a wide range of opportunities for both the newcomers and also for the local community.

In the case of Tempelhof airport, its massive area and largely arcing hangers has the potential to provide refugee shelters in its massive hangers. As well, the new chapter for the former cold war airport is another remarkable shift that manifested the power of symbolic transformation and humanitarian uplift and makes Berlin the new stage for political possibilities and a moral leader of a new democratic world. Moreover, selection of the highly politicized and contentious sites like Tempelhof airport, which was the international symbol of totalitarian megalomania and cold war propaganda as the refugee camp, intensifies the complexity of its associations. In this respect, architecture can become a useful link to integrate refugees in host cities and to encourage positive interactions between refugees and host city. However, regarding the fact that mass accommodation lead to the increasing tensions among refugees, affordable private flats can be a better solution to integrate them in host city.

On the other hand, the case of Ex-Moi in Turin, Italy, is characteristically different from the case of Tempelhof airport of Berlin. Although in the Ex-Moi case, the functionality of the existing facility has changed but it has occurred through illegal mechanism of invading and squatting. Here, after the short-period of assistance that were served by the State, refugees had to meet their own housing needs without sufficient resources and institutional support. As a result, these refugees who were incapable of obtaining accommodation, invaded the abandoned facility of the Olympics Village and resettled down there. This case demonstrates the deficiency of reception solutions and the systematic policies, in long-term, in supporting refugees' social and housing needs and highlights the gap between national laws and local implementations that creates a discriminatory state in the path towards social inclusion [19]. The case is a well manifestation of social and spatial exclusion of these refugees affected by the local control policies and social alienation processes. So, migrants are the passive actors of urban transformation through appropriation and formation of informal settlements and creating conflicts. Moreover, refugees have used squatting as a mean to announce their voice and achieve social identification.

The two cases have emphasized on the capability of adaptive reusing of existing building stock in providing temporary housing solution for refugee crisis. In this respect, it is necessary to well define the housing policies that clearly support refugees and the assistance of non-profit organizations like NGO's and social cooperatives can be also a matter of importance regarding their precious experience. Analyses suggest that increased prices for building houses and expensive construction due to the energy restrictions in buildings is the main challenge that Germany is currently struggling for providing refugee housing in national and local level. In the case of Italy, housing shortage, spatial exclusion, fragmentation and lack of support for social inclusion of refugees are the major challenges. Moreover, it is noticeable that the presence of refugees is useful for the European economy. So, there is a possibility for the economic growth and also for the revitalization of the abandoned spaces through the presence of newcomers and their social integration with the excising society.

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